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**THE GENTLEMANLY IDEAL IN JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA***  
**BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

The present thesis focuses on the study of the English gentlemanly ideal in Jane Austen's novel *Emma*. The aim of the present thesis is to find out what constitutes the ideal of the English gentleman and whether and how the gentlemanly ideal is represented in the novel by Jane Austen. This analysis is done on the example of three gentlemen – Mr Elton, Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley, who are the potential suitors of the heroine, Emma Woodhouse.

The present thesis consists of four parts: the introduction, two chapters and the conclusion. The introduction provides the background and Jane Austen's importance for the study. The first chapter of the thesis is the theoretical part, focusing on the concept of the English gentlemanly ideal and the cult that goes along with it. Describing what were considered to be the characteristics of a proper English gentleman at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The second chapter deals with the analysis of the gentlemanly ideal represented in *Emma*. In this part the characteristics of the three gentlemen are brought out and their faults and virtues are discussed separately. The thesis concludes with the summarization of the main findings of the thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	2
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	5
CHAPTER 1 The English gentlemanly ideal .....	6
CHAPTER 2 Emma's suitors .....	11
CONCLUSION .....	24
REFERENCES .....	27
RESÜMEE .....	28

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*E*      *Emma*

## INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen is thought to be the ‘most thoroughly English’ writer of fiction (see Sales 1996: 11). This is due to her novels being set in the English countryside, in the real, deep England. This particular Englishness associated with Austen is also being defined in class terms. In her works Austen depicts the status and authority of the country house. Her society is still largely based on the feudal village and the rural life. (Sales 1996: 13, 16)

Austen’s novels are not only comic stories with happy endings, but in a way social history as well. Although the mode of life in Jane Austen’s novels is idealised, these works still portray the behaviour that was considered proper for ladies and gentlemen and how marriage, property and social differences were looked upon at the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Mason 1982: 70-71) Besides describing the society and surroundings of the country gentry their personal life is portrayed as well, showing how the upper classes lived in “an ambience of cultivated politeness” as well as “how they dressed and dressed up, dined and feasted, performed and were entertained, in a selection of social settings” (Watkins 1990: 7).

In my thesis I am going to discuss the English gentlemanly ideal at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. I have chosen the novel *Emma* as my basis for the thesis as in it Austen has managed to depict the ideal of the English gentleman on the example of Mr Knightley. The purpose of the paper is to find out the following: what constitutes the ideal of the English gentleman and how Jane Austen represents the ideals and proper behaviour of the English gentleman in her novel *Emma*.

## CHAPTER 1

### The English gentlemanly ideal

The heroine of the novel, Emma Woodhouse, is a confident, yet inexperienced young woman. She lives in Hartfield, which is situated in the village of Highbury, with her valetudinarian father. Emma's social circle is closed as she spends most of her time with her father, governess Miss Taylor and friend of the family Mr Knightley. This circle begins to expand when Miss Taylor marries Mr Weston. To Mr Woodhouse, who only cares about his own personal convenience, Emma doubles as a dutiful daughter and a mother. He sees all change as something not to be desired and always requires support either from Emma or Mrs Weston. It is due to his influence that Emma has never ventured far from home, not even to visit local sights such as Box Hill, which is only seven miles from Highbury. Therefore, Emma's experiences are limited, and her understanding of the world is limited as well.

In *Emma* Highbury is a place where tradition and the quintessential English values meet with the new values set in society (Morris 2017: 83). The Woodhouses are first in consequence in Highbury and therefore Emma has power and authority. She is confident and used to always having things her way. She is conceited, and her standards are very high, but she is also very naïve. For Emma "privilege of rank" is important and she sees herself as "the maintainer of social order and civility" (Morris 2017: 85, 88). Austen's representation of the country gentry displays the conflict apparent in society and the debate on who exactly is a gentleman and becoming the member of gentility. In the novel, the friendship between Mr Knightley and Mr Martin, a young farmer for whom Mr Knightley has a high regard for, is one of the ways Austen uses to portray the emerging social inclusion and analyse questions like what is meant by 'gentleman' and 'gentility'. (Morris 2017: 102)

In the novel Emma Woodhouse has three potential suitors – Mr Elton, Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley. At the beginning of the novel all three of the gentlemen are

seemingly perfect. They seem to be men whom it is suitable and logical for Emma to marry if she so desires. They are very handsome and charming with wonderful manners that give the illusion of them being true English gentlemen. However, her naiveté makes Emma blind to the shortcomings of her suitors. It is impossible for her to understand the world around her correctly without the guidance of Mr Knightley. It is important to note that Emma does not learn through her mistakes, but rather by analogy. In the novel Emma's guesswork is contrasted with Mr Knightley's knowledge of the world and more skilled reading of the telling signs. Austen has built up the novel in such a way that the reader learns together with Emma. In the beginning Emma's naiveté makes her blind about the shortcomings of her suitors and her own misinterpretations. With Emma's emotional progress and Mr Knightley's guidance, both Emma and the reader begin to comprehend that not all potential suitors measure up to the standards of a perfect gentleman. In the end only the one proper gentleman, Mr Knightley, truly follows the proper code of conduct.

The 'English gentleman' is a unique phenomenon of the nation. The English gentleman was an ideal, the personification of "all the essentially English virtues". (see Collins 2002: 92) Gentlemanliness greatly influenced the way of life of the English, playing a large part in their ideas on education, work and politics (Mason 1982: 12). The English gentleman has a very important role in English literature and culture as well, figuring in different plays, poems, novels (Tsang 2017: 178, Corfield 1992: 46).

According to Philip Mason (1982: 10), "the concept of the gentleman was an element in the unity of the nation". At the beginning of the nineteenth century the concept of the cult of the gentleman was not something new, but rather the ideals of the previous centuries were inherited and then modified. The term meant different things to different people: to some it meant "anyone as good as I am or better", to some it meant having a hereditary title and ownership of land. But to everyone it meant a standard of conduct that was to be followed.

(Mason 1982: 12-13) In his book Mason (1982: 13-14) writes that to him it seems that the desire to be a gentleman “ran through the English history from the time of Chaucer until the First World War and after that the idea as a social force began to die”.

Philip Tsang writes:

The ‘gentleman’ does not exist as a concretely defined identity but connotes a spectrum of gender- and class-based assumptions and performatives. /.../ Treating the gentleman as a single, narrowly defined figure /.../ [one] risks overlooking the incongruities, contradictions and paradoxes in the genealogy of gentlemanliness. (Tsang 2017: 179-180)

Since the ideal of the English gentleman has not been fixed, but rather flexible, it has managed to adapt with the different times and changes in emphasis and thus survive throughout centuries (Corfield 1992: 40). Since it was not clear who exactly was a gentleman and who was not, the term was often used in such a way that the speaker himself or at least his son could be considered to be part of the cult of the gentleman (Mason 1982: 9). Everyone could claim to be a gentleman since birth was rather an indicative, not a conclusive part of the gentlemanly status, the test was public acceptance (Corfield 1988: 379, 381). The desire to become a gentleman is closely connected with the cult of the gentleman, as the qualities gentlemen possessed were admired (Tsang 2017: 178, Mason 1982: 10). According to Mason (1982: 10), it is important to distinguish social rank and the behaviour proper to the rank since these two aspects do not always coincide. Although, it was not important for a gentleman to be extremely wealthy he needed to have sufficient funds to allow time for leisure (Corfield 1992: 42). A true gentleman had to be responsible – do his duty, “fulfil his obligations”. It was important to accept and exercise his right for leadership and be a good landlord. (Mason 1982: 13, 16)

There was a code of conduct that a proper gentleman always followed, and this code was like a second religion to the English people (Mason 1982: 12, Collins 2002: 93). A real gentleman was looked upon like he was a saint with excellent manners (Corfield 1988: 382). Collins (2002: 93) writes “Jesus was thought to be a ‘Perfect Gentleman’ and God the greatest gentleman of all”.



Mason (1982: 71) writes that it was important for a man to have “elegance, gentility, an air and a manner, good taste, sound principles, fidelity, consideration for others” for him to be considered a gentleman. Proper manners were of the utmost importance since a true gentleman never said it out loud that he was a gentleman, but rather “followed the code of behaviour unconsciously” (Mason 1982: 14). “Honour, integrity and self-sufficiency” were thought to be essential for a man to be called a gentleman (Mason 1982: 19). During the eighteenth century the idea that “personal gentility was based upon individual morality and merit” strengthened. The concept of ‘nature’s gentleman’ developed as a perfect gentleman had to have a great mind as well as an excellent background. There was the idea that the gentlemanly qualities came “naturally from within”. (Corfield 1992: 43-44)

According to Philip Mason:

For Chaucer and his audience, it was an accepted convention that true love, and proper behaviour to women, were something understood only by those who were ‘gentil’ /.../: having the qualities proper to a gentleman /.../, the emphasis being sometimes on birth, sometimes on upbringing, sometimes on consideration for others. Sometimes it is used as almost interchangeable with the word ‘free’ and means ‘forgiving, generous, confident in one’s own integrity’. (Mason 1982: 36)

Corfield (1992: 40) writes that “from its earliest usage in English the term ‘gentle’ carried both social and moral connotations”. It was thought that a person had ‘gentillesse’ if he was generous and courteous towards others, especially to “the defeated, to the poor, to the unhappy”. It was important to be virtuous, intelligent, graceful and not be quarrelsome or silly. (Mason 1982: 55) Good birth does not always prove true ‘gentillesse’. Therefore, courteous behaviour, especially being generous, was most important, but one had to “be generous within reason, not to the point of extravagance and folly”. (Mason 1982: 37) “The aristocratic standard of behaviour” towards women was considered a very important part of ‘gentillesse’ and although the concept of the gentleman has changed, this aspect has remained important (Mason 1982: 27).

Austen’s novels illustrate the ideas of the behaviour that was thought to be proper for a perfect gentleman. In her works she portrays every sense of being a gentleman. (Mason

1982: 79) The heroes in Austen's books have "the style and elegance of a gentleman", but also "a sense of humour, certain enthusiasm, consideration for others and are conversable" (Mason 1982: 77-78). A true Austenian hero had proper qualities such as "warmth, faithfulness, he was enduring in love". He was rather silent in general company. (Mason 1982: 78) Although Mr Knightley might appear "rather taciturn and occasionally grim, it was more appropriate for a gentleman to have proud silence, an austere reserve than to be charming and flashy". In fact, reserve prevented explosions of temper and was thought to be better on the part of both sexes. (Collins 2002: 94, Mason 1982: 79) The calm manner of the English gentleman was seen as "modesty mingled with self-assurance" (Collins 2002: 94).

## CHAPTER 2

### Emma's suitors

In the novel Emma has three potential suitors – Mr Knightley, Mr Elton and Frank Churchill. In *Emma* Austen has made Mr Knightley the standard of gentlemanly perfection. He is the gentleman every other gentleman is compared to. The faults of the other suitors - Mr Elton and Frank Churchill, emphasize the virtues of Mr Knightley.

All of the suitors are very charming and with good manners. However, as time passes Emma learns more about their character and begins to see faults in the behaviour of Mr Elton and Frank Churchill. In comparison with the other gentleman, Mr Knightley is more reserved and sensible. His position in society is established, while Mr Elton and Frank Churchill are still working for their positions so they both try to be agreeable to everyone. This causes them to make many mistakes. Therefore, in this part of the thesis I will observe the three gentlemen in question in depth and bring out their faults and virtues separately.

#### Mr Elton

Emma's first potential suitor is Mr Elton. He is the vicar of Highbury and a new addition to Emma's social circle. Mr Elton is a very handsome man and his manners are considered to be most pleasing. To the people of Highbury, he is "the standard of perfection, both in person and mind /.../, Mr Elton has not his equal for beauty or agreeableness". (*E* 54, 137) He is "good-humoured, cheerful, obliging, and gentle" (*E* 25). He is a great favourite wherever he goes. The people of Highbury look up to him, just like to Mr Knightley (*E* 59). Emma tells Harriet that "in one respect, perhaps, Mr Elton's manners are superior to Mr Knightley's /.../, [his] manners have more gentleness" (*E* 25).

Emma has the opinion that it is time for Mr Elton to marry and is confident that she will find him a great wife. At the same time Mr Elton is certain that Emma is in love with

him. He is very gallant towards Emma which confuses her instead of pleasing as she is confident that Mr Elton is in love with Harriet Smith. Therefore, she dismisses his gallantry for error of judgement. Emma considers Harriet a perfect wife for Mr Elton as he would advance her situation in society. Mr Knightley tries to warn Emma that Mr Elton “may talk sentimentally but will act rationally” and will never marry Harriet (*E* 51). Mr Knightley has much truer knowledge of Mr Elton’s character than Emma (*E* 107).

Despite Mr Elton being very much admired by the people of Highbury, Emma only considers him to be quite the gentleman. The idea of who was a gentleman was not fixed but was indicated by air and manner, therefore it was essential to follow the proper code of conduct. Mr Elton’s fault is that he lacks the elegance of feature which was essential for a true English gentleman. Mr Elton with his great manners can make himself look better situated in life than he really is, but Emma is still not convinced. Although good birth did not always prove that a man was a gentleman, Mr Elton, who is not part of the rank of gentry lacks true elegance and knowledge of taste due to him not always living in the best society (*E* 107).

Mr Elton’s lack of elegance is evident when Emma decides to take Harriet’s likeness and Mr Elton is overwhelmingly emotional and keeps praising Emma despite knowing nothing of drawing. According to Austen (2007: 37, 66), “he sighs and studies for compliments” more than what is proper, his speeches are extensively elevated, and this makes Emma laugh. Mr Elton with his stylistic excess is contrasted with Mr Knightley, who only shows disinterested criticism concerning the picture and says that Emma has made Harriet too tall (*E* 36). Mr Elton rushing to London to get the portrait framed is again one of the “over-reaching gestures which prove his ill-breeding” (Blythe 1966: 20).

Even though Mr Elton may lack the elegance of feature, he has knowledge of the world and, as Austen (2007: 51) writes, Mr Elton is very confident and knows that he is a

handsome young man and a great favourite wherever he goes. He has a private income and stipend, good manners, he is “a man every woman not fastidious would like” (*E* 26). Therefore, he does not wish to throw himself away but to get married to a wealthy woman. Thus, Mr Elton pretends to be in love with Emma, an heiress of 30, 000 pounds. However, there is no real affection in his manners. (*E* 108)

Mr Elton is confident that Emma is in love with him and thus makes bold advances. At the Christmas party at Randalls Mr Elton is constantly imposing his ideas on Emma and addressing her upon every occasion (*E* 94). After her brother-in-law Mr John Knightley warns Emma that Mr Elton is showing interest in her and says that “never has he ever seen a man more interested on being agreeable than Mr Elton”, pleasing ladies is “downright labour to him /.../ and every feature works” (*E* 88). Emma begins to realize that it might be so. She is certainly not pleased about Mr Elton’s nonsense, but cannot be rude to him in case all would still turn out right for Harriet. His ill-breeding is once again proved when he sits between Emma and Mrs Weston without an invitation and goes even so far as to make Emma promise him not to visit Harriet’s sick chamber. He assumes the right of being her suitor and expresses it publicly. (*E* 99-100)

Mr Elton considers himself to be a true gentleman, an equal to a lady such as Emma Woodhouse. He does not seem to comprehend his position in the upper circles of society, but understands the gradations of rank below very well, as he looks down on Harriet when Emma reveals her plans for Harriet and him to marry. In reality, Mr Elton is no proper gentleman and he is much inferior in talent and all the elegancies of the mind. Mr Elton proves himself to be “proud, assuming, conceited, very full of his own claims and little concerned about the feelings of others”. (*E* 108)

Mr Elton is a social climber (Blythe 1966: 22). For him money and wealth are very important as he is only a vicar. He is without low connections; however, he allies himself

with trade and the only real advantages he has are his pleasing manners and handsome looks. (*E* 26, 108-109) After being rejected by Emma Mr Elton quickly marries another woman of means with a trading background. Despite her wealth she is considered of low origin. Traders were thought to be only moderately genteel, they did not have independent means. (*E* 164) Mrs Elton proves to be as proud, assuming and conceited as Mr Elton himself. The fact that Mr Elton has chosen such a wife shows that he does not recognize proper manners. After the wedding Mr Elton's true character is brought out as he and his wife both show their tactlessness and vulgarity. However, Mr Elton himself does not appear to realize this and is very proud of his wife. With the wedding Mr Elton has secured his wealth and does not have to strive towards pleasing everybody like he did before.

Both Mr and Mrs Elton lack the elegance of mind and proper manners and they display their discourteous behaviour. They wish to slight Emma and do so through Harriet. (*E* 225, 267) When there is a ball in the Crown Inn, Mr Elton does not ask Harriet to dance and makes a spectacle out of his rude behaviour, "showing his liberty and resolution of maintaining it". (*E* 262) Actually, this sort of behaviour displays Mr Elton's foolishness (*E* 264). This finally proves how mistaken Emma had been and that Mr Elton does not have the qualities a true English gentleman should possess. In comparison, Mr Knightley once again displays proper behaviour and good character as he invites Harriet to dance. This invitation was "the kind action; that was the noble benevolence and generosity; that was the service which /.../ [showed] how superior he [Mr Knightley] was to every other being upon earth" (*E* 328). The behaviour of Mr Knightley is very much in contrast with "the littleness and unpardonable rudeness" Mr Elton shows (*E* 265-266).

## Frank Churchill

Frank Churchill is idolized by the people of Highbury. He is the son of Mr Weston who is the husband of Emma's former governess. Emma has never met him before, but she has heard quite a lot about him as he is thought to be so very charming by everyone in the village. So, with the aid of her fanciful imagination Emma is certain that she has ample knowledge of the character of the young man (*E* 97).

Emma's resolution is not to marry, but it seems very suitable to her that if she ever were to do so, Frank Churchill would be just the man for her as he was suitable "in age, character and condition". The family connection is important as well, as Emma herself says, she has decided to like him and be liked by him to a certain degree. (*E* 95) Emma's fondness towards Mr and Mrs Weston is the reason why she is prejudiced in his favour (*E* 120). Emma is certain that Mr and Mrs Weston and perhaps others from Highbury will find them to be suitable for each other and she finds great pleasure in this (*E* 95).

After their first meeting Emma thinks Frank Churchill is a very good-looking young man: "height, air, address, all were unexceptionable, and /.../ he looked quick and sensible". There was a "well-bred ease of manner, and a readiness to talk". (*E* 151) He appeared to have "a very open temper – certainly a very cheerful and lively one; she could observe nothing wrong in his notions" (*E* 163). Emma thought that not enough had been said in his praise as he had elegant manners without exaggeration (*E* 151-152).

Throughout the course of the novel Frank Churchill makes severe mistakes which he manages to conceal at the time, partly because he knows how to make himself agreeable to almost everyone (*E* 151). For example, it is Frank Churchill's duty to come to Highbury after his father's wedding to meet Mrs Weston. However, when he does not come it is thought to be the fault of Mrs Churchill at Enscombe. Later when Frank Churchill does

arrive, his primary aim is not to pay respects to his father but to be in the same circle as Jane Fairfax.

The only one who is not charmed by Mr Churchill seems to be Mr Knightley who argues that Frank Churchill did not act right by his father when he did not come to Highbury immediately after Mr Weston's wedding. Mr Knightley says that if he chooses "a man can always do /.../ his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution". It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay his attention to his father, "if he wished to do it, it might be done". (*E* 116-117) Mr Knightley voices his opinion that Frank Churchill is weak if he did not come to Highbury due to the disapproval of the Churchills at Enscombe. Mr Knightley reasons that it would not be hard for a sensible man to oppose the slight made to his father – "he would feel himself in the right; and the declaration, made of course, as a man of sense would make it, in a proper manner, would do him more good /.../, fix his interest stronger with the people he depended on, than all the line of shifts and expedients can ever do". (*E* 117-118)

Mr Knightley agrees that Frank Churchill is "well-grown and good-looking, with smooth, plausible manners" (*E* 119). However, he also thinks that Frank Churchill "has learnt to be above his connections, and to care very little for anything but his own pleasure", as it seems like he leaves the side of his aunt and uncle "whenever he thinks it worth his while, whenever there is any temptation of pleasure". This is thought to be the influence of Enscombe as "it is natural that a young man, brought up by those who are proud, luxurious, and selfish, should be proud, luxurious and selfish too". (*E* 116) Mr Knightley says that Frank Churchill "may be very 'amiable', have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people – nothing really amiable about him" (*E* 119).



Mr Knightley gives Emma guidance on Frank Churchill. With his gentlemanly perception has much truer knowledge of Frank Churchill's character than the others at Highbury. Frank Churchill gives the assumption that his delay was due to the Churchills, when in reality it was his own doing that he did not come immediately to do his duty and pay his respects. This shows very clearly that Frank Churchill is conceited, selfish and does not follow the proper code of conduct of the English gentleman.

Frank Churchill is the most dandy-like of the gentlemen in *Emma*. He once travels sixteen miles twice over seemingly merely to have his hair cut and when questioned about this tells Emma that he has "no pleasure in seeing his friends unless he can believe himself fit to be seen" (*E* 176). This affects Emma's very good opinion of him as there was "an air of foppery and nonsense" in this trip which did not seem in accordance with "the rationality of plan, the moderation in expense, or even the unselfish warmth of heart", which Emma had seen in him. Instead "vanity, extravagance, love of change, restlessness of temper, which might be doing something, good or bad; heedlessness to the pleasure of his father, indifference as to how his conduct might appear in general - he became liable to all these charges". (*E* 163) With the hair incident he has "added to the fact of being a chatterbox an interest in his own hair and thus had proved himself guilty of the two most unforgiveable weaknesses to be discovered in an English gentleman" (Blythe 1966: 26). By others in Highbury this trip was viewed without prejudice as "liberal allowances were made for the little excesses of such a handsome young man – one who smiled so often and bowed so well" (*E* 163-164).

After they become more acquainted, Emma "does not build upon his steadiness or constancy" anymore (*E* 211). She begins to see faults in his behaviour such as "the nature of his gallantry" which seems "a little self-willed" and that "he would rather oppose than lose the pleasure of dancing with her" (*E* 199). Mr Churchill is also too liberal and careless with

Highbury's protocol, "of pride, indeed, there was, perhaps, scarcely enough; his indifference to a confusion of rank bordered too much on inelegance of mind" (*E* 158).

Frank Churchill is seemingly a true and gallant courtier with the aim of conquering the heart of Emma Woodhouse. There are many who think that these two should be together. Even Mr Knightley thinks Emma is in love with Frank Churchill, so does Emma herself at one point. It seems so certain that Miss Woodhouse is the object of his admiration. Everything declares it, especially his attentive behaviour towards Emma and Mr Weston's hints. They also flirt very openly at the party at Box Hill and at the party at Coles' he does not sit until he can find a seat by Emma's side. In reality, Frank Churchill is attentive and courteous to Emma to hide the fact that he is actually engaged to Jane Fairfax. Since Miss Fairfax is poor, this match has to be kept a secret, as Mrs Churchill would never allow it. Therefore, his desire for his aunt's approval and a share of the Churchills' wealth does not let him act the way that is proper for an English gentleman.

"A man's true worth is closely connected with his /.../ awareness of the woman's predicament. He must never exploit it and at the same time he must not allow his compassion for the girl to detract from either his own aggression or his statement of desirability" (Blythe 1966: 29). Frank Churchill violates the ethical code as he deceives Emma and all her friends. However, he does not seem to see any harm in the secret (Blythe 1966: 25). All the while this secret has made Jane Fairfax very miserable, as "she never knew the blessing of one tranquil hour" for many months (*E* 336). With this deception Frank Churchill has shown "none of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life" (*E* 321). Miss Fairfax accepts this deception out of love, even though this hurts her self-respect (Blythe 1966: 26). This secret also hurts Mr and Mrs Weston. Austen (2007: 331) clearly brings out that this is not the proper behaviour for a gentleman as Mr Churchill is so

strikingly contrasted with Mr Knightley when Emma says that “Mr Knightley is the last man in the world who would intentionally give any woman the idea of his feeling for her more than he really does”. This is exactly what Frank Churchill does when he deceives Emma and everyone else around them.

With his attempts to conceal the engagement Frank Churchill makes severe mistakes. He enjoys the deception as he flirts very openly with Emma while ignoring Jane Fairfax. There is no need for him to go to such lengths to hide the secret. He could be neutral and more attentive and polite towards Jane Fairfax and not flirt with Emma at all. This behaviour continues even after Frank Churchill realizes how miserable it is making Jane Fairfax. This shows that Frank Churchill is narcissistic and thinks only about himself as it is evident that it is hard for Jane Fairfax to live with the secret. Frank Churchill gives Miss Fairfax promises without knowing how to keep them. Their marriage happiness is dependent on the loss of Mrs Churchill, who would never let them marry despite herself being of similar origin as Jane Fairfax. It is not possible for Frank Churchill to know when their wedding could take place and therefore he selfishly and unjustly makes Jane Fairfax wait. This causes problems as she is expected to become a governess very soon. When Jane Fairfax has had enough she takes steps to end the engagement and secures a governess position. She lets Frank Churchill know immediately, but once again he displays his narcissistic behaviour and does not do anything at first, only stirring when it is finally convenient for him to do so - when his aunt has passed away.

### **Mr Knightley**

Mr Knightley is a very intimate friend of the family. He is the elder brother of Mr John Knightley, who is Emma’s brother-in-law. It is evident that Mr Knightley is the standard of gentlemanly perfection in Emma’s opinion as she constantly compares the other

potential suitors with him. Mr Knightley is a “timeless Englishman” – he is “modest, just and never dull” (Blythe 1966: 16). He is the “real thing: unaffected, has native intelligence, but is not intellectual and not very talkative, which is a good thing because being loquacious was not considered proper for a gentleman in England” (Blythe 1966: 16). Ronald Blythe (1966: 16-17) writes that Mr Knightley “employs patience and tact easily and never with any sense of having to resort to them, /.../ things are what they are and not what they seem when he is present”.

In comparison with the other gentlemen mentioned before, Mr Knightley is the sensible older gentleman. His air is remarkably good, and he has a cheerful manner, is very humane and good-natured. “One might not see one in a hundred with gentleman so plainly written as in Mr Knightley” (*E* 24). Being generous was most important for a gentleman and “no one is more likely to do anything really good-natured, useful, considerate or benevolent” than Mr Knightley (*E* 177). He supports and gives advice to his neighbour Mr Martin, a young farmer who he considers to be an excellent man. Mr Knightley’s good opinion of Mr Martin is evident when he protects the young man in front of Emma. Mr Knightley is always very attentive towards Mr Woodhouse, a valetudinarian who mostly only cares about himself. For example, he made sure that while Mr Woodhouse was at the strawberry-picking party at Mr Knightley’s estate, Donwell Abbey, every comfort was made available to him. Mr Knightley also takes time to always thoroughly explain the parish business to Mr Woodhouse and makes sure he understands. Mr Knightley is very benevolent, and it is natural for him to help the Bateses and Miss Fairfax in every way he can. Mrs Bates is the widow of the former vicar of Highbury and her daughter Miss Bates takes care of her and they try to make a small income go as far as possible. Miss Fairfax is an orphan, she is the only child of Mrs Bates’ youngest daughter. Mr Knightley is always very attentive and benevolent towards the ladies. For example, he sent his carriage to take the ladies to the party

at Randalls and often sends them produce from his own garden. Just like it was proper for the English gentleman Mr Knightley did not want to dwell on his kindness (*E* 181).

Mr Knightley, “with his large tract of land and hereditary title is part of the class with the highest prestige, the ‘country owners’” (Davidoff 1973: 30). This gives him a sort of power over the people of Highbury (Blythe 1966: 16). Mr Knightley has “downright decided, commanding sort of manner /.../, [which] his figure and look and situation in life seem to allow” (*E* 25). Mr Knightley always does his duty. He is a very important member of the community, he plays a big role in the parish business as a magistrate. In addition to that he is a responsible landowner. He has little ready money, but he manages his estates very well. Mr Knightley is not a provincial country squire, but with his brother being a lawyer in London he has many important connections.

Unlike Mr Elton and Frank Churchill, Mr Knightley’s situation in life allows him to act like money is of no importance to him. In contrast with the other gentlemen, Mr Knightley is not working for a better position in life. His power and position in Highbury are already established and questioned by nobody. Mr Knightley is even taking precedence over Mr Woodhouse, who is the head of “a younger branch of a very ancient family /.../ held in a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood” (*E* 108). It is clear that Mr Knightley feels very comfortable at Hartfield, as he is there very often, occasionally even walking in past the calling hour.

Mr Knightley is “loving rather than lover-like and his natural goodness has tried to keep Emma on the right path”, being the only one who ever pointed out her faults and gave her guidance. In a way Mr Knightley has protected her. It can even be said that he has “groomed Emma” for their marriage. (Blythe 1966: 16-18) While Emma is young and naïve, Mr Knightley is educated, sensible, sees everything, and understands everything. In the novel his task is to guide Emma and the reader in the right direction. “The reader sees

everything through Emma's eyes but judges it by Mr Knightley's standards" (Blythe 1966: 14).

Mr Knightley has good observation skills and great instincts. When Emma and the others are deceived, Mr Knightley is not. For example, Mr Knightley quickly understands that Emma wishes that Harriet and Mr Elton would marry. He warns her that Mr Elton "may talk sentimentally but will act rationally" and will never marry Harriet (*E* 51). In addition, he is the first to have the idea that there is a connection between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. He tries to warn Emma, but she thinks that this idea is ridiculous.

From "family attachment and habit, and thorough excellence of mind" Mr Knightley has watched over Emma since she was a little girl, "with an endeavour to improve her, and an anxiety for her doing right". Emma has been first with Mr Knightley even when she deliberately opposed his advice. (*E* 334) He never flatters or overpowers her with praise. (*E* 5) Whenever Mr Knightley tries to improve Emma "he never goes too far, never gives offence, but expresses upright justice and clear-sighted goodwill" (*E* 334). He says that whenever Emma behaves wrong he cannot bear to see it "without a remonstrance" (*E* 302). She has respect for his judgement in general, which makes her dislike having it against her (*E* 51). For example, when Emma insulted an old family friend Miss Bates at the Box Hill party Mr Knightley strongly expressed himself on the subject and accused her of being insolent (*E* 302). He voiced his opinion on the offence because he was her friend. After their conversation Emma saw with "mortification and deep concern" how inappropriately she had behaved (*E* 303). Therefore, once again Emma was influenced right by Mr Knightley. It happened more often than she would own (*E* 372).

Mr Knightley is very sensible and pragmatic. When others are given to emotional outbursts he is not. At the party at Randalls when others are panicking about the snowfall and fearing that the roads are impassable, Mr Knightley is the only one to remain perfectly

calm and goes outside to examine the situation. He even walks a considerable way along the road. When he comes back he tries to reassure everyone that there is no need to worry. There is an overall panic and he is the one who tries to solve the situation, by recommending that the Hartfield party left with Mr Woodhouse. (*E* 102-103) He is pragmatic even when dealing with love. Mr Knightley is the one that comes to the idea that for him to marry Emma he is the one who needs to move as it is not reasonable for the valetudinarian Mr Woodhouse to be liable to any change. (*E* 360)

Mr Knightley is attentive towards women, however in comparison with the other gentlemen, Mr Elton and Frank Churchill, his attentiveness is natural. Mr Knightley does not have fake empathy, he never flatters. He shows true English delicacy towards the feelings of other people and this behaviour comes naturally to him. Mr Knightley's wonderful manners and good character are displayed when he invites Harriet to dance after Mr Elton displays his vulgarity and rudely ignores her (*E* 262). Harriet is humiliated but Mr Knightley very calmly, without any fuss invites her to dance. This invitation reinforces him as the standard of gentlemanly perfection in Emma's eyes and shows his superiority over the other gentlemen.

## CONCLUSION

The ‘English gentleman’ is a unique phenomenon, an ideal, the personification of all the essentially English virtues. Gentlemanliness has played an important part in the life of the English, especially in their ideas on education, work and politics. During the time *Emma* was written, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the concept of the cult of the gentleman was not something new, but rather the ideals of the previous centuries were inherited and then modified. The flexibility of the ideal has helped it to adapt with the different times and changes in emphasis and thus survive throughout centuries.

There was a code of conduct that a proper gentleman always followed, and this code was like a second religion to the English people. It was important for a man to have elegance, gentility, an air and a manner, good taste, sound principles, fidelity, consideration for others and an aristocratic standard of behaviour towards women. Being generous and courteous towards others, especially to those weaker than oneself was of utmost importance.

Jane Austen’s novels portray the behaviour that was considered proper for ladies and gentlemen and how marriage, property and social differences were looked upon at the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In her works she portrays every sense of being a gentleman.

In *Emma* the heroine is a confident, yet inexperienced young woman. Emma has three potential suitors – Mr Elton, Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley. At the beginning of the novel all three of the gentlemen are seemingly perfect. They are very handsome and charming with wonderful manners that give the illusion of them being true English gentlemen. However, Emma’s naiveté makes her blind about the shortcomings of her suitors and her own misinterpretations. With Emma’s emotional progress and Mr Knightley’s guidance, she begins to comprehend that not all potential suitors measure up to the standards



of a perfect gentleman. In the end only the one proper gentleman, Mr Knightley, truly follows the proper code of conduct.

Emma's first potential suitor is Mr Elton. He is the vicar of Highbury and at first a very handsome man with most pleasing manners. The people of Highbury think very highly of him. However, despite all of this Emma only considers him to be quite the gentleman as Mr Elton lacks the elegance of feature which was essential for a true English gentleman. Mr Elton is only a vicar, with allies in trade and it is important for him to marry well and so he pretends to be in love with Emma. Mr Elton is a very confident and knows that he is a handsome young man and a great favourite wherever he goes. He considers himself to be a true gentleman, an equal to a lady such as Emma Woodhouse. After being rejected by Emma Mr Elton quickly marries another woman of means with a trading background. The woman is as proud and conceited as Mr Elton. After the wedding Mr Elton proves that he is no proper English gentleman as he and his wife display their vulgarity and tactlessness and their lack of the elegance of mind.

Frank Churchill is idolized by the people of Highbury. Emma has never met him before, but she has heard quite a lot about him. Despite her resolution not to marry it seems very suitable to Emma that if she ever were to do so, Frank Churchill would be just the man for her as he was suitable in age, character and condition. The family connection is important as well. Throughout the course of the novel Frank Churchill makes severe mistakes which he manages to conceal at the time, partly because he knows how to make himself agreeable to everyone except Mr Knightley, who thinks that Frank Churchill cares only for his own pleasures. Frank Churchill is seemingly a true and gallant courtier with the aim of conquering the heart of Emma Woodhouse. In reality Frank Churchill is attentive and courteous to Emma to hide the fact that he is secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax. He severely violates the ethical code as he deceives Emma and all her friends and makes Jane Fairfax miserable. He

does not appear to see any harm in the secret and instead enjoys the deception as he flirts very openly with Emma while ignoring Jane Fairfax.

Mr Knightley is the sensible older gentleman, a timeless Englishman. His air is remarkably good, and he has a cheerful manner, he is very humane and good-natured. Mr Knightley is part of the class with the highest prestige, he is a landowner, and this gives him a sort of power over the people of Highbury. Mr Knightley's situation in life allows him to act like money is of no importance to him. In comparison with the other gentlemen, Mr Knightley is not working for a better position in life.

In conclusion, Jane Austen has managed to capture the ideal of the English gentleman on the example of Mr Knightley. He is the standard of gentlemanly perfection to Emma. The other gentlemen are constantly compared to him and their faults emphasize the virtues of Mr Knightley.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Keili Õispuu**

**The Gentlemanly Ideal in Jane Austen's *Emma* (Härrasmehe ideaal Jane Austeni romaanis „Emma”)**

Bakalaureusetöö

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Käesolev bakalaureusetöö analüüsib inglise džentelmani ideaali Jane Austeni romaanis „Emma”. Antud töö peamine eesmärk on välja selgitada mida kujutab endast inglise džentelmani ideaal ja kuidas see ideaal on esindatud Jane Austeni romaanis. Seda analüüsitakse kolme džentelmani, härra Eltoni, Frank Churchilli ja härra Knightley, näitel. Nemad on teose kangelanna, Emma Woodhouse'i potentsiaalsed kosilased.

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatusest, kahest peatükist ja lõppsõnast. Sissejuhatuses on esindatud töö taust ja Jane Austeni olulisus uurimuses. Bakalaureusetöö esimene peatükk on töö teoreetiline osa, keskendudes inglise džentelmani ideaali ideele ja sellega kaasas käivale kultusele. Kirjeldaldes, mis olid tõelisele inglise džentelmanile iseloomulikud tunnused 19. sajandi alguses. Teine peatükk on pühendatud romaanis „Emma” esindatud džentelmani ideaali analüüsile. Selles osas tuuakse välja kolme härrasmehe iseloomujooned ja nende vigu ja vooruseid arutatakse eraldi.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et inglise džentelmen on ainulaadne nähtus, ideaal, vooruste personifikatsioon. Õige härrasmees järgis alati käitumiskodeksit: mees pidi olema heade kommetega ja hea maitsega, kindlate põhimõtetega, ustav, näitama naiste vastu üles austust ja peeni kombeid. Oluline oli olla heasoovlik ja viisakas kõigiga, aga eriti just endast nõrgematega. Raamatus on Emmal kolm potentsiaalset kosilast. Nad on kõik väga nägusad ja võluvad, aga ainult härra Knightley käitub alati nii nagu tõelisele inglise härrasmehele kohane.

Märksõnad: Jane Austen, 19. sajandi inglise kirjandus, inglise džentelmen

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